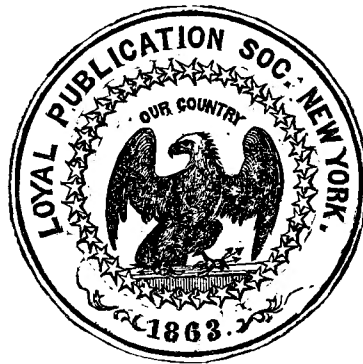


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RESULTS OF THE
SERF EMANCIPATION
IN RUSSIA.



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RESULTS OF THE SERF EMANCIPATION IN RUSSIA.

Rev. J. Lang, an English missionary, who visited Russia last summer, has published the following interesting account of the effects of the emancipation of the serfs in that country :

I recently spent five months in Russia, mainly in order to gain information from the best sources on the facts connected with the serf emancipation movement; and I have consulted the enemies as well as the friends of the measure, English and German residents as well as Russians. The leaders afforded me every facility of access to official documents, and I visited estates in various parts of Russia to make further inquiries into the local working of the measure.

Whatever may be thought of the conduct of Russia towards Poland in carrying on the present war, I trust that due credit may be given to the present Emperor and the Russian liberals for this noble act of serf emancipation. They had a hard battle to fight against the reactionary party, who denounced emancipation as socialism, for they knew that it must gradually introduce in its train a host of other reforms. They prophesied that anarchy and bloodshed must ensue; but the Emperor gave no heed, and was prepared to risk his crown and his life in order to free the peasant.

Serf emancipation is an accomplished fact. Twenty-three millions of an intelligent, active peasantry have been by it raised from the degradation of being mere chattels, things for sale; though it must be admitted that serfdom was not so degrading as slavery is. The intellect and social energies of the serfs, which have been frozen up for centuries, are now set free; and this great social change has been effected within two years,

in spite of the formidable opposition of the Russian nobility. The fiat of one man, supported by a few choice spirits, has accomplished all this. The revolution has been a bloodless one; no social disorganization has resulted; and even some of its bitterest opponents begin now to admit that, as the operation had to be performed some time, it was as well to do it at once. They are now learning to adapt themselves to the new order of things.

Serf emancipation is of deep interest, for the following considerations :

1. The anti-slavery cause receives powerful encouragement from it. It took many years' agitation, and the expenditure of £20,000,000 sterling, to emancipate 800,000 slaves in the West Indies. American slavery has lasted a long time, and is still a fearful blot; but in Russia we have, in the short space of two years, the emancipation of 23,000,000 of a fine race of peasants, who are, physically and mentally, superior to the negro race. The influence and example of these emancipated serfs will operate on the world, and will show that, while so beneficial a revolution has taken place successfully in Russia, other countries may learn to 'go and do likewise.' The serfs have shown, by their peaceful demeanor, and by avoiding any violent excess, that they know how to appreciate their newly-acquired liberty.

2. The friends of constitutional government have reason to rejoice in serf emancipation, as forming the first instalment of liberal institutions in Russia. Even the late Emperor Nicholas was convinced that emancipation was necessary, but he would not give it, knowing that it would involve reform in all other departments of the state; that the upheaving of the masses would affect every institution in Russia. As serf emancipation included municipal institutions for the peasantry, a constitution, therefore, for all Russia follows as a corollary; and I found, among all intelligent Russians, the full conviction that a constitution must naturally come in a few years; that as municipal constitutions grow out of emancipation, so provincial assemblies are the result of municipal freedom, and a constitution will be the fruit of provincial assemblies. These steps are now being taken.

3. Municipal institutions for all Russia are the certain result. I have been delighted to see how the peasantry, by means of the commune or village elective council, regulate their own affairs, elect the chief of each village, have their regular village meetings. I will explain this more at large in a subsequent letter. But this municipal liberty granted to peasants cannot be limited to them; there will soon be municipal bodies in every town in Russia. Moscow and Petersburg, since the last two years, have been granted Mayors, elected by the citizens, without the control of government, and also provincial assemblies. As the next step, what has been conceded to the peasants cannot be denied to the merchant and noble. These municipal institutions are training schools for the peasantry; they enable them to resist the oppression of the noble and the government employees; they also break the force of that centralization which has been such a curse to Russia; and they are nuclei to protect the weak against the venal police of Russia; for in the peasants' court, oral evidence, summary decision, and publicity, form the rules of proceeding, while a simple and cheap code of law is administered.

4. An honorary magistracy and municipal institutions serve as training schools for justices of the peace, a class who may exercise an important influence in diminishing what has been admitted to be the great curse of Russia, viz., the venality of ill-paid employees and bribery. To carry out the Emancipation act, fifteen hundred unpaid justices of the peace were nominated by Government. The administration of these men, who were selected for their character and public spirit, has generally given satisfaction, and it is intended that they shall be continued, to discharge similar duties to those of county magistrates in England. I attended several of their monthly sessions in the interior of Russia, and they are well spoken of; their labors are as successful as those of a similar class of honorary magistrates in India.

5. The cause of education is identified with emancipation. Already, within two years, more than 8,000 new schools have sprung into existence through individual efforts among the peasantry, and they are rapidly on the increase. The peasant is

anxious to be able to read the laws by which he is governed; besides, the elevation of his social position through emancipation gives him the means as well as the inclination to learn to read. The example of peasant elevation in other parts of Europe confirms this. In Russia, before emancipation, there was scarcely a day school among the peasantry; but these 8,000 schools have arisen spontaneously from the wish of the peasants, aided by the clergy and gentry. The government has spent nothing on them. The Emperor Nicholas allowed only colleges and universities, and that to a very limited degree; serf emancipation inaugurates the education of the masses.

6. Religious progress is deeply connected with an enlightened and independent peasantry, who will not be the victims of superstition or priestcraft. Religion follows in the train of civil liberty. With the fall of feudal tyranny, priestly exactions and domination must cease. Many Russians have assured me, that, since emancipation, a great desire has sprung up in various quarters among the peasantry to read the scriptures, and they show their interest by purchasing copies, while, to meet the new state of things, the Greek Church—highly to its credit—is publishing the Russian New Testament at the low price of 6d a copy.

7. The cause of peace is likely to be served. Under serfdom the military life benefited the peasants, as becoming a soldier conferred freedom on them; but the peasant now has a *status* and a stake in the country, and is therefore not so inclined to become 'food for powder.' Serf emancipation, by pushing on internal reform, is calculated to withdraw the attention from objects of aggression, and to point out to Russia that internal development, and not foreign conquest, is her true strength. The Russian peasant sympathises with this, as he has secured to him by emancipation the possession of land, the great *desideratum* with the masses in Russia. The grand scope of her ambition, a *proletariat* peasantry, supplies ample material for war. The Russian peasant, therefore, will naturally prefer agriculture to war, while the elevation of his social position, in creating new wants, will give a fresh impulse to trade—one of the great antagonists of war.

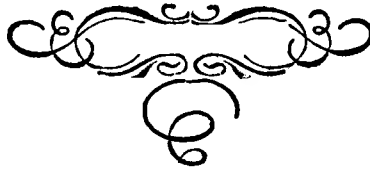
8. The effects in Asia are likely to be great. Already, through the length and breadth of India, has this great measure received the warmest sympathy from natives of all classes, who view it as a sign of great good to them that Russian influence in Central and Northern Asia will be on the side of an emancipation policy, as English influence has been in India. The Slavonic and Anglo-Saxon races will thus co-operate as anti-slavery advocates through Asia.

9. The Russian nobility have long been noted for absenteeism, extravagant luxury and false varnish. Serfdom tempted them to be tyrants and afforded full scope for all depraved propensities; the troops of servants kept in idleness enervated the master, while the power he had of deporting them to Siberia or inflicting torture produced a hardening effect on his heart. To keep up a life of luxury he had to peculate in the public offices. There are nearly three hundred thousand nobles in Russia. Emancipation is already leading many of them to reside on their estates, consequently to lead simple lives, and identify themselves more with the welfare of the country.

10. The social condition of the peasant is being improved. The anxiety of the peasant to purchase land, so strongly marked in France, is showing itself also in Russia, thus leading to habits of industry, in order to procure the means of making the purchase. Indolence, the natural fruit of serfdom, is giving way to the encouragement of industry. One million peasants have bought up the land on which they were formerly located, borrowing the money from government. The price of land is rising all through Russia, owing to the peasants renting or hiring it to a far greater extent than formerly, though the enemies of emancipation said the peasants would be too indolent to cultivate the land. Money is no longer hidden in earthen pots in the ground, or in the wall, through fear of the steward. The peasants' houses in some quarters are exhibiting a greater appearance of comfort, and providing more rooms, instead of—after the old fashion—crowding twenty-five into a room. More houses have been built within the last two years than during the previous six.

In conclusion, peace has been generally maintained. Dur-

ing the carrying out of this measure, there were only two cases of revolt, caused by a rumor spread among ten thousand peasants in the governments of Kazan and Panja that the Emperor had ordered no more money to be paid. I myself resided for a time in the centre of a district one hundred miles south of Moscow, and the proprietor never locked his door at night. Nowhere in Russia did I hear any expressions uttered of apprehensions of social disorganization or riot.



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